
THE
SEVENTY-FIRST
CAME...
TO
GUNSKIRCHEN
LAGER

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FOREWORD

The damning evidence against the Nazi war criminals found at Gunskirchen Lager is being recorded in this booklet in the hope that the lessons learned in Germany will not soon be forgotten by the democratic nations or the individual men who fought to wipe out a government built on hate, greed, race myths and murder. This is a true record. I saw Gunskirchen Lager myself before the 71st Division had initiated its merciful task of liberation. The horror of Gunskirchen must not be repeated. A permanent, honest record of the crimes committed there will serve to remind all of us in future years that the freedom and privileges we enjoy in a democratic nation must be jealously guarded and protected.

WILLARD G. WYMAN
Major General, USA
Commanding

"THE AMERICANS HAVE COME — AT LAST"

Capt. J. D. Pletcher, Berwyn, Ill., of the 71st Division Headquarters and Cpl. James DeSpain, Allegan, Michigan, arrived at Gunskirchen Lager the same morning the camp was found by elements of the Division. Capt. Pletcher's account of the scenes he witnessed follows:

"When the German SS troops guarding the concentration camp at Gunskirchen heard the Americans were coming, they suddenly got busy burying the bodies of their victims — or rather, having them buried by inmates — and gave the prisoners who were still alive what they considered an extremely liberal food ration: One lump of sugar per person and one loaf of bread for every seven persons. Then, two days or a day and half before we arrived, the SS left. All this I learned from talking to inmates of the camp, many of whom spoke English. Driving up to the camp in our jeep, Cpl. DeSpain and I, first

Prisoners stream from Gunskirchen as guards flee.

knew we were approaching the camp by the hundreds of starving, half crazed inmates lining the roads, begging for food and cigarettes. Many of them had been able to get only a few hundred yards from the gate before they keeled over and died. As weak as they were, the chance to be free, the opportunity to escape was so great they couldn't resist, though it meant staggering only a few yards before death came.

"Then came the next indication of the camp's nearness — the smell. There was something about the smell of Gunskirchen I shall never forget. It was strong, yes, and permeating, too. Some six hours after we left the place, six hours spent riding in a jeep, where the wind was whistling around us, we could still detect the Gunskirchen smell. It had permeated our clothing, and stayed with us.

"Of all the horrors of the place, the smell, perhaps, was the most startling of all. It was a smell made up of all kinds of odors — human excreta, foul bodily odors, smoldering trash fires, German tobacco — which is a stink in itself — all mixed together in a heavy dank atmosphere, in a thick, muddy woods, where little breeze could go. The ground was pulpy throughout the camp, churned to a consistency of warm putty by the milling of thousands of feet, mud mixed with feces and urine. The smell of Gunskirchen nauseated many of the Americans who went there. It was a smell I'll never forget, completely different from anything I've ever encountered. It could almost be seen and hung over the camp like a fog of death.

"As we entered the camp, the living skeletons still able to walk crowded around us and, though we wanted to drive farther into the place, the milling, pressing crowd wouldn't let us. It is not an exaggeration to say that almost every inmate was insane with hunger. Just the sight of an American brought cheers, groans and shrieks. People crowded around to touch an American, to touch the jeep, to kiss our arms — perhaps just to make sure that it was true. The people who couldn't walk crawled out toward our jeep. Those who couldn't even crawl propped themselves up on an elbow, and somehow, through all their pain and suffering, revealed through their eyes the gratitude, the joy they felt at the arrival of Americans.

"An English-speaking inmate offered to show us around the camp. We accepted his offer. Another inmate organizer asked me if he could climb on the jeep to say a few words to his people. We helped him up on the hood and he yelled for order. He spoke in his native tongue — Hungarian, I believe — and my guide interpreted for us. He was asking the inmates to remain in the camp and not clutter up the roads, some 3,000 had already left, and he wanted his fellow prisoners to help the Yanks by staying off the roads. He told them that the Americans were bringing food and water and medical help. After every sentence he was interrupted by loud cheers from the crowd. It was almost

The ground in the dank woods was sloppy.

like a political speech. Everyone was hysterical with joy at being found by the Americans, yet in a frenzy of hunger, for they had had no food since the Germans left two days before, and not enough to keep anyone alive for months before.

"During the talk of the man on our jeep hood, a tall, blondehaired man approached me. He spoke excellent English. He was an engineer, educated in New York. He had committed the crime of letting Jewish blood inflitrate into his family stream some generations back. As hungry as he was for food, he was hungry for news. He said the camp inmates had known all about the movements of the Yanks for the past five days. Every day they had known we were coming closer, and as we approached, the anticipation in the stinking hole of Gunskirchen heightened. Through the last few, foodless days, the inmates had lived on faith alone, he said. Faith that the Americans would come soon. He was vitally interested in knowing about all phases of the

European War. He asked about the other armies, how far they had advanced, how fast they were moving, about the Russians. He eagerly listened to all the news I could give him.

"The man on the jeep hood spoke for about five minutes. At the completion he asked the people to clear the road so that we might proceed. Many of the more energetic waved the cheering crowds back to clear a path just wide enough for our vehicle.

"All wanted to get close enough to see and many wanted to touch us as we

Death freed this victim of tyranny.

moved slowly on. It was like a triumphal procession with the milling crowd cheering and waving their arms in exaltation.

"The thousands of prisoners had been crammed into a few low, one-story, frame buildings with sloppy, muddy floors. Those who were able had come out of the buildings, but there were hundreds left in them — the dead, the near-dead, and those too weak to move. Sometimes, my guide said, it was so crowded in the buildings that people slept three-deep on the floor, one on top of the other. Often, a man would awake in the morning and find the person under him dead. Too weak to move even the pathetically light bodies of their comrades, the living continued sleeping on them.

"The camp was littered with bodies."

"I want to make it clear that human beings subjected to the treatment these people were given by the Germans results in a return to the primitive. Dire hunger does strange things. The inmates of Gunskirchen were a select group of prisoners — the intellectual class of Hungarian Jews, for the most part. professional people, many distinguished doctors, lawyers, representatives of every skilled field. Yet, these people, who would naturally be expected to maintain their sense of values, their human qualities, longer than any others, had been reduced to animals by the treatment of the Germans — the deliberate prolonged starvation, the indiscriminate murder on little or no provocation,

the unbelievable living conditions gradually brought about a change in even the strongest.

"The camp was littered with bodies. Since the Germans had left, the inmates had been unable to cope with the swiftly mounting death rate. As long as the SS men were in charge, they made the stronger inmates dig crude pits and bury the dead, not for sanitary reasons, but in an attempt to hide some of the evidence of the inhuman treatment given their prisoners.

"For the thousands of prisoners in Gunskirchen, there was one 20-hole latrine. The rule of the SS men was to shoot on sight anyone seen relieving himself in any place but the latrine. Many of the persons in the camp had diarrhea. There were always long lines at the latrine and it was often impossible for many to reach it in time because of hours spent waiting. Naturally, many were shot for they could not wait in line. Their bodies were still lying there in their own filth. The stench was unbelievable.

"Cpl. DeSpain and I both remarked later about the appearance of the inmates — that they all seemed to look alike. When men are reduced to skeletons, as these men were, they all resembled one another — the only difference being in their height and the color of their hair.

"My guide explained that many of the new prisoners at Gunskirchen had

Prisoners crowd around a liberator.

recently been forced to march from the vicinity of Hungary to Gunskirchen. There was very little food. They died like flies. If they fell out and were too weak to continue, the SS men shot them. The air-line distance from the Hungarian border to Gunskirchen is 150 miles. The intervening territory is full of mountains and winding roads, so the actual distance these people walked was far greater than 150 miles. It is not hard to imagine the thousands of skeletons that mark their route.

"The hunger in evidence is hard to imagine. We found huge animal bones in camp -- the bones of a horse or cow the prisoners had found and smuggled into camp. Usually these prizes were eaten raw, the flesh torn from the bones and swallowed in great gulps.

"Rarely did a prisoner have the strength to curb his hunger long enough to cook what food he got. Outside the gate of the camp was the carcass of a horse that had been killed by shellfire. There was a great, gaping wound in his belly. As we passed it, one of the inmates was down on his knees, eating off the carcass. It had been dead several days. The next day, when we came back, the whole side had been sliced away. Though our troops got food to them as soon as possible, many could not wait. Of course, we quickly gave away all the

Hundreds of deads like these lay on the ground.

Two of the "stronger" prisoners.

rations and cigarettes we had. It was strange to see them eat the cigarettes instead of smoking them. Not one cigarette did I see smoked. They were all swallowed in a hurry.

"American troops soon organized things. Water was hauled in German tank wagons. All horses and wagons in the vicinity were put on a food hauling detail. We found a German food warehouse three miles from Gunskirchen stocked with dried noodles, potatoes, soups, meats and other food. German civilians took it to Gunskirchen under the supervision of American military government personnel, and before we could establish proper control some of the prisoners had gobbled down the food, gorged themselves and died. A starving person must learn to eat all over again.

"None of the inmates of Gunskirchen will ever be the same again. I doubt if any of us who saw it will ever forget it — the smell, the hundreds of bodies that looked like caricatures of human beings, the frenzy of the thousands when they knew the Americans had arrived at last, the spark of joy in the eyes of those who lay in the ditches and whispered a prayer of thanks with their last breaths. I felt, the day I saw Gunskirchen Lager, that I finally knew what I was fighting for, what the war was all about."

"THIS ACTUALLY HAPPENED . . ."

It was V-E Day. While the world celebrated, the weary men of Company "K", 5th Regiment, 71st Infantry Division, commanded by Capt. Horace S. Berry of Spartansburg, S. C., faced the task of cleaning up Gunskirchen Lager, a German concentration camp near Lambach, Austria; of sending the living to hospitals, of supervising the burying of the dead, of trying to cover the stench coming from the half-finished buildings in the woods. They had been working at the job since May 5, the day after Company "M" and Company "K", like all others who saw it, will never forget.

In order that more people may know about the record of German inhumanity and barbarity revealed at Gunskirchen, the 71st Division publishes this booklet. As strong as the words in these eyewitness accounts may be, as gruesome as the photographs and paintings may seem, they fall far short of expressing the horror that was Gunskirchen — a horror that no words or pictures could fully show.

On V-E Day Pfc. Norman Nichols, former Detroit art student, placed on a roving assignment by Major General Willard G. Wyman, commanding general of the 71st Division, set up his easel in the stinking patch of woods at Gunskirchen Lager and faithfully recorded the depths of degradation and suffering reached by "non-ayran" prisoners of the Reich. Pfc. Nichols was with rifle companies of the 71st when the big push of the war's closing weeks was on. He was under fire and shared the many discomforts of the infantryman's life, but this was his most unpleasant job of all.

But because he and the men who have seen such camps in all part of Germany believe that the people back home should know, his pictures include all the details as they actually appeared that bright May morning. The pain-racked, starving, skeleton-like figures of the prisoners are not caricatures. These people actually were that skinny. The piles of bodies and parts of bodies jumbled in death's grotesque postures are not exaggeration. The buildings, the woods, the roads near Gunskirchen Lager were choked with bodies. Artist Nichols has given a faithful picture of a German concentration camp. Cynical persons who have put down as "propaganda" the stories of brutality in the Nazi prison camps may call Nichols' sketches "just another atrocity" story. To Pfc. Nichols and the men of the 71st Division, "atrocity" is a mild word for what they saw.

This actually happened.

German soldiers carry half-dead and dying prisoners from one of the stinking huts to a German truck for transportation to a hospital. The several-day-old body in the foreground, one of many left where they fell, is ignored by both soldiers and prisoners.

"The German soldiers who were detailed to carry out the living, bury the dead and clean up the buildings denied any connection with the camp", Artist Nichols said. "The said it was another SS mess." The half-crazed, starving Jews were so glad to see the Americans they kissed the hands of embarrassed, nauseated Yanks who came away from the scenes of Nazi horror with an almost irresistable desire to shoot every German soldier on sight.

As the living were bring removed, the job of collecting and burying the dead was begun. None of the bodies was heavy for they were little more than bones. One detail of Germans collected the dead and placed them in a clearing, while another group dug graves. The kneeling boy to the right of Artist Nichols' picture sat most of the day staring at the body of his brother, sobbing quietly and begging the Germans to give him a decent burial in an individual grave.

"Every time the Germans would go anywhere in the woods, they'd find more bodies of prisoners who had gone off from their comrades to die". Nichols said. Almost any disease in the book could be recognized in the dead and dying men, though the few women in the camp who had been on "friendly" terms with the guards were apparently well-fed and buxom. One of these women walked back of the above burial scene and Nichols shows her in the right background.

"Sometimes we slept three deep in the mud of the barracks", an inmate related. "We were too weak to move out the dead, too weak to move ourselves, so we slept with the bodies." All the inmates were vermin-infested and many were covered with huge, open sores. This is a scene inside one of the buildings at Gunskirchen Lager.

THE STATES HEARD . . .

Major Cameron Coffman, Fort Thomas, Ky., Public Relations Officer of the 71st Division, visited Gunskirchen Lager on the afternoon of May 4, 1945, shortly after its liberation by American troops. The news release he wrote about Gunskirchen, which was published in several United States papers, is printed below in full:

BY MAJOR CAMERON COFFMAN

With the 71st Division of the Third Army in Austria, May 4, 1945: Nazism at its worst was unfolded in stark reality before Doughboys of the 71st Infantry Division today when they stumbled upon a carefully concealed concentration camp six kilometers north of Lambach, Austria, which held 18,000 persons who were not true "Aryan" or whose political opinions were contrary to Hitler's "New Order".

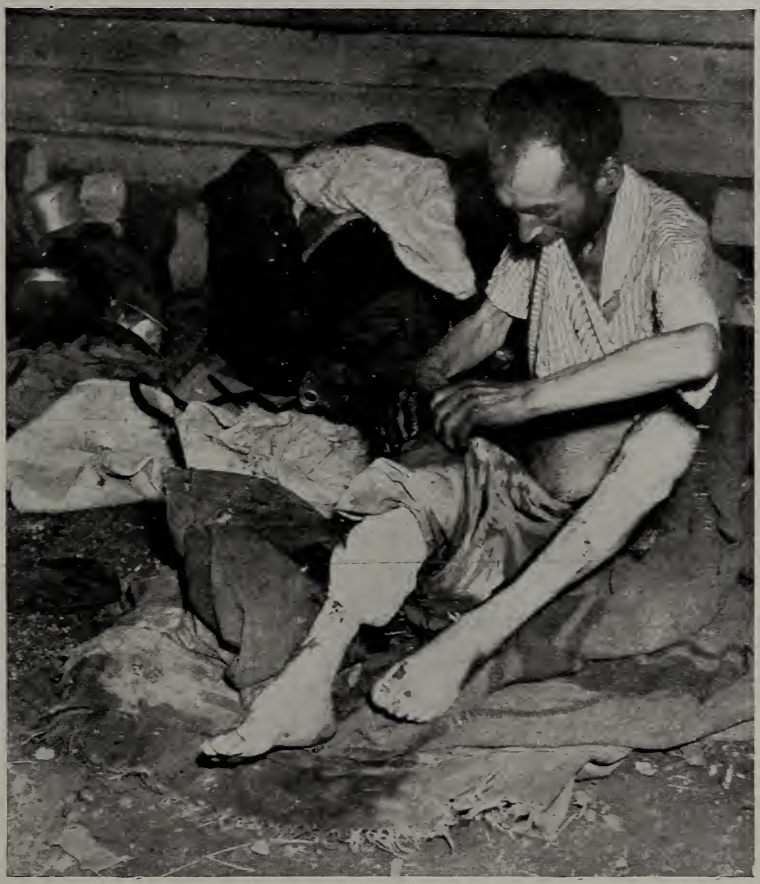
My days of reading about Hun atrocities were over. I visited that camp today. The living and dead evidence of horror and brutality beyond one's imagination was there, lying and crawling and shuffling, in stinking, ankle-deep mud and human excrement. The sight and smell made your stomach do funny things like an egg-beater churning within. It was impossible to count the dead, but 200 emaciated corpses would be a very conservative estimate. For the most part they had died during the past two days, but there were many other rotting bodies inside the barracks beside living human beings who were too weak to move.

It is practically impossible to describe in decent or printable words the state of degradation in which the German guards had permitted the camp to fall. Located in a dense patch of pine trees, well-hidden from the main highway as well as from the air, the site was well-suited for the slimy, vermin-infested living conditions that existed there. To call the camp a pig sty would be doing injustice to a self-respecting pig. The sight was appalling, and the odor that reached you a hundred yards or so from the camp site was nauseating.

Traveling into the camp along a narrow wagon road was an experience in dodging the multitude of dazed men, women, and children fleeing from the horrors of this living hell. The natural impulse of these people after the Americans arrived was one of hysteria — a desire to escape — to leave that place forever behind them. The road was clogged with hundreds, but many did not get far. Dozens died before they had gone but a few hundred yards from their "hell-hole" prison. Americans soldiers cussed violently in disgust as their

trucks roared past the grotesque figures in the ditches and shuffling feebly along the road.

As we entered the first building the sight that met our startled gaze was enough to bring forth a censorable exclamation from a sergeant who had seen the bloodiest fighting this war has offered. He spat disgustedly on the filthy dirt floor and left the building which was originally built for 300 but



Prisoners' bodies were covered with sores.

now housed approximately 3,000. Row upon row of living skeletons, jammed so closely together that it was impossible for some to turn over, even if they could have generated enough strength to do so, met our eyes. Those too weak to move deficated where they lay. The place was crawling with lice. A pair of feet, black in death, protruded from underneath a tattered blanket just six inches from a haggard old Jew who was resting on his elbow and feebly attempting to wave to us.

A little girl, doubled with the gnawing pains of starvation, cried pitifully for help. A dead man rotted beside her. An English-speaking Jew from Ohio hummed, "The Yanks Are Coming", then broke out crying. A Jewish Rabbi tripped over a dead body as he scurried toward me with strength he must have been saving for the arrival of the American forces. He kissed the back of my gloved hand and clutched my sleeve with a talon-like grip as he lifted his face toward heaven. I could not understand what he said, but it was a prayer. I did not have to understand his spoken word.

Few of those remaining in the building could stand on their feet. The earth was dank and a chilled wind cut the smell of death and filth. Small fires of straw added to the revolting odors that filled the air. One man crawled over several prostrate bodies and patted the toe of my muddy combat boot in child-like manner.

Lt. Col .Kenneth W. Foster (center), G-2, visits scene.

Everywhere we turned the pathetic cry of "wasser" (water) met our ears. An English-speaking Czechoslovakian woman told us that they had received no food or water for five days. The appearances of the starving horde more than verified her statement. A lieutenant stooped to feed one creature a bit of chocolate. The man died in his arm. That lieutenant, formerly and officer in the Czech Army, fingered his pistol nervously as he eyed a group of German soldiers forcibly digging a grave outside. I also pumped a cartridge in my automatic. As I left him there were tears streaming down his face. His mother was last reported in a concentration camp "somewhere in Germany".

Before our arrival conditions had been so crowded that all could not lie down to sleep at one time. Those with strength enough to stand took turns sleeping. The dead were buried in mass graves behind the so-called barracks, but the death rate became so high that unburied piles of dead remained with the living. Many of these unfortunates were using the corpses as pillows. I counted 27 in one heap in a dark pine grove in the camp area. It was not a pretty sight.

An unforgettable drama was enacted when a sergeant of our group of five raced out of one building, his face flaming with rage. The sergeant, a Jewish boy of Polish descent, had found three of his relatives lying in the filth of that barracks. They are sleeping tonight between white sheets for the first time in three years in one of the better homes in Lambach. Their diet of a daily cup of anemic soup has suddenly changed to eggs, milk, and bread. A Yank with an M-1 rifle casually drops in at regular intervals to see how they are faring.

Military government and medical personnel of the 71st Division were busy at work before we left the camp two hours later attempting to bring relief to the chaos of suffering the fleeing Germans had left behind.

Extended supply lines made the food situation a major problem until ingenious doughboys discovered a German supply train nearby. Captain William R. Swope, Lexington, Ky., assisted by an excited Austrian girl brakeman, drove the train onto a siding near the camp. Physical force was necessary for order when the first food lines were organized as it was the first these hunger-crazed persons had seen in many days.

A scene on the return trip to Lambach was a fitting climax to the horror we had left. Two "fugitives from hell" were ravenously tearing the entrails from a long-dead horse and gulping huge bites. Another sergeant, whose mother and father disappeared into a Nazi concentration camp three long years, ago, turned his head and in a tear-choked voice remarked:

"And Hitler wanted to rule the world."

AND AFTERWARDS . . .

BY CPL. JERRY TAX

We pulled into Wels, Austria, that morning in two jeeps and a three-quarter ton radio truck. In the lead jeep were Colonel Augustus Regnier, C. O., 66th Infantry Regiment, his driver and his machine-gunner, in the next were four MPs, and then came four of us in our 571st Signal Company truck with a battered but serviceable Signal Corps radio.

The day was bright, sunny and warm, and full of rumors that the war was over. As it turned out, it took three more days before the rumors became official news.

Our little convoy drove along hushed streets for a while; here and there a shell-burst or a bomb-crater seemed the only familiar, almost friendly, sight in the city. A few buildings, pock-marked by machine-gun and rifle fire, attested to what must have been an extremely feeble attempt to defend the city.

We followed Colonel Regnier around as he took the surrender of two German garrisons, one at the airport and one in the large compound in the heart of town. He also secured all bridges and posted guards at their approaches.

German prisoners were put to work.

Some more victims of Gunskirchen Lager.

At the airport, we were about to drive out on the runways to inspect the few German fighter planes left there intact when we discovered that the area around each one was carefully mined.

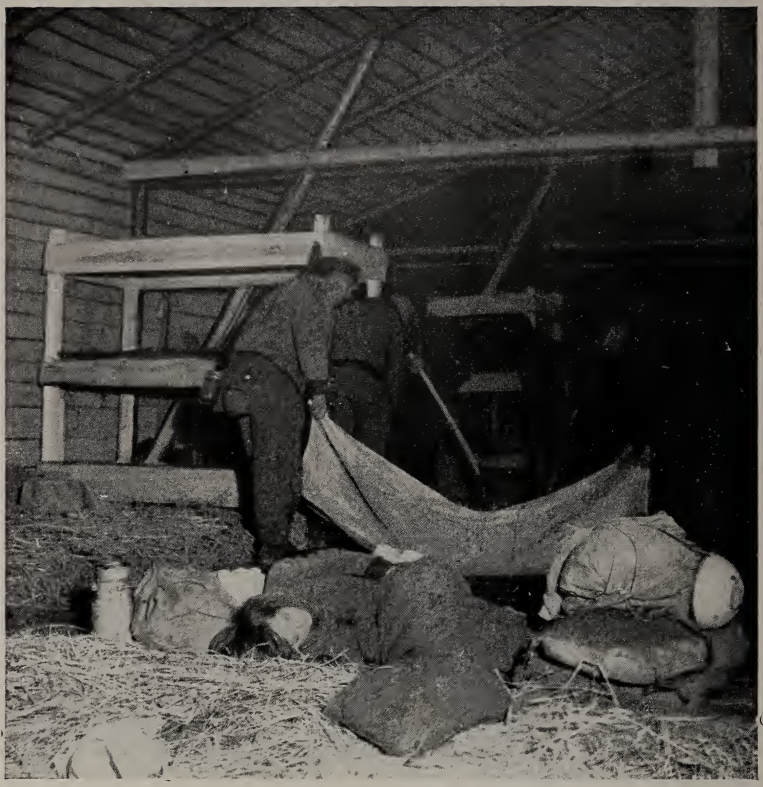
It was just about then that the inhabitants of Wels began to realize that the event they had been anticipating, some eagerly to be sure, was taking place before their shuttered windows and sealed-up entrances to air-raid shelters. The Americans were here.

Colonel Regnier selected as the site of his temporary CP an office building on the largest open square in town. We parked there and continued sending out routine messages concerning the bridges we'd secured, the number of prisoners taken, and other administrative matters. Then came the deluge.

By the thousands, civilians crowded into the huge square, examining our vehicles and our clothing, marvelling at what little equipment we carried, and assuring us that there were no Nazis among them, only good Austrians who loved Americans and hated Hitler and Company. It 's happened to all of you, in every town Americans took from Normandy to wherever we finally stopped.

About two o' clock in the afternoon, for some reason not apparent to us at the time, the crowd began to melt away ... back into shuttered homes, down twisting alleyways to storm shelters ... by twos and groups they left us, in quiet contrast to their noisy, enthusiastic approach. It wasn't long before we discovered why.

Drifting down into the great square, in every conceivable conveyance, on foot, on hands and knees — utilizing every inch of the wide streets — came the former inmates of Gunskirchen Lager near Lambach. With hardly a sound, they slowy engulfed the cobble-stoned avenues that led inwards, like an



A scene in one of the hutments.

irresistible but languid flood, driving the civilans back to their homes before them. The news of our coming had reached the camp that morning, and practically all of the estimated 18,000 in the camp who were able to move or be moved were en route the eleven miles into town to look upon their liberators.

Neither words nor pictures — and thousands of both have been printed — have ever told the full story of these wretched people, or the incredible misery of existence at Lambach. That story, however, could be read in the faces and what passed for the bodies of the swarm of pitiful humanity that flowed into the square and surrounded our vehicles.

No more than one in a hundred walked upright, dozens were dragged into town full-length on rude carts; with their last ounce of strength, still others shuffled along leaning on sticks, crude crutches and each other. Their garments came out of a wild costumer's hallucination. They ran the gamut from tattered uniforms that had been worn twenty-four hours a day for three or four years to wrappings of rags. None, obviously, had been washed in that time. Lice and vermin of every sort crawled among the folds of these filthy rag-bag costumes and on the misshapen, emaciated bodies of the men.

The hands that clutched at what scraps of food and candy we distributed until we had no more were skin and bone and blue-black nail ... like the claw of some predatory owl who had enjoyed a profitable night among the

The deads and dyings lay on the floors together.

field-mice. Skin and bone .. skin and bone and filthy rags and bodies crawling with vermin ... row on row, endless .. filling the square. And not a sound. Not one human sound came from those thousands of throats. Perhaps they hadn't the strength to speak, even in gratitude. Perhaps words of thanks were long forgotten ... forgotten under the lash and the pistol-butt, the abyssmal degradation.

It would be fine and thrilling to say that despite their pitiful condition, despite their rags, the years of torture and abject slavery and starvation, hope and joy shone from the eyes of these men. But it wasn't so. To be sure, the eyes were far from blank, but there was no joy, no hope in them. These were not the eyes of men set free. Perhaps the gigantic, impossible fact of liberation was just too big, too miraculous to grasp. Perhaps, in their incredibly weakened physical condition, liberation was too great a shock to be assimilated. Whatever the reason, these were simply broken, beaten men we looked out on, row on row.

And in their eyes, you read the story of the past four or five years. You didn't have to look at that one's back to see the scars where the whip had dug deep; the scars were in his eyes. Would they ever leave them?

Prisoners dug mass graves for the deads.

You didn't have to stare in helpless fascination at that walking skeleton to learn what systematic starvation can do to a man's body; from the depths of his soul that hunger came to you from his eyes, blinding insatiable hunger. Would it ever again leave them?

And that one lying there on the cobblestones, a heap of filth and rags. Neither water nor food nor miracle drug could heal him. Perhaps he knew it. Perhaps he only asked to be carried here to look upon the miracle before he died. What of his eyes? You looked deep and all you saw were impotence

There were many bodies lying in thick woods.

and hopelessness. And his hours were too few for a madman to entertain the dream that they would ever again leave them in this world.

For hours it seemed we stared out on this sea of human misery. There was little we could say, and less we could do after all our food, candy and cigarettes were gone. Intermittently, as the work of setting up his Command Post got underway, Colonel Regnier had messages for us to send out. One I'll never forget. I sent it myself. You'll never see any like it in training manuals or practice code books. It was marked "urgent" and read something like this: "Send medical supplies and food immediately ... 15,000 people in urgent need of delousing ..."

About four o'clock, we could feel that something was going on out or our sight. The crowd before us had started to move towards one side of the

square . . . more accurately, it was compressing itself slowly away from the other side. Faintly we heard the rhythmic step of marching men on cobblestones; suddenly a column of German soldiers came down one of the streets leading towards the center of the square and began filing into it. They were, we supposed, the garrisons who had surrendered earlier in the day. As they came in, they lined up, in regular ranks, in the space just recently left vacant. And now they were all in .. perhaps two or three hundred of them.

Here was a sight, here was a scene a master of stagecraft would have called an achievement. Maybe some Master of human props and sets had staged it. On one side of the square, in neat ranks, stood the would-be Herrenvolk. Their smart grey uniforms were pressed; chubby pink cheeks and an occasional paunch left no doubt they had fed well on their loot and what they could extract from slave labor on their farms. In their eyes was still the arrogance of the conqueror. (Would it ever leave them?)

Facing them, in disorder, in indescribable disarray, standing up in ox-carts, lying on their bellies, leaning on each other ... were the free men of Russia, France, Poland, Yugoslavia, the Balkans . . . a heterogenous collection of skin, bone and filth. About twenty yards separated the two groups .. twenty yards and the whole world. And the square was as still as a tomb.

For a half hour that dragged interminably the two groups stood there, immobile. Not a voice was raised, not a fist shaken . . . not a stir. MPs were busy about the task of arranging for transportation for the Germans. That was all.

And yet I could have sworn something was taking place out there. I climbed out of the truck and walked slowly through the crowd. Was it my imagination? Was it wishful thinking? To this day, I can't answer those questions, and I wish I could. But I saw, or thought I saw, in those eyes, the faintest glimmer of what I had looked for vainly but a half hour before. Perhaps the shock was wearing off. As they looked upon their well-fed erstwhile jailers standing in neat ranks, waiting to be led away, the huge, impossible truth began to dawn in their consciousness and in their eyes. The long years were over. The Germans were captives. They were free men at last.

Within another hour, the square was empty. Germans were on their way to internment. Every wheeled vehicle within miles was commandered to take the sick and starving ex-prisoners to places already being set up to feed and care for them. Our CP was established and functioning smoothly.

That night, as the free men of France, Poland, Russia, Yugoslavia and the Balkans prepared for their first untroubled sleep since a madman with a comic moustache took control of an ambitious Germany, the spirit of a new Europe was being born in their hearts.

Who knows what the Germans were thinking?

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